

LEARNING PLUS



PROVIDING ESSENTIAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS

Learning Plus is one of three Bold Initiatives of UNICEF's Basic Education and Gender Equality (BEGE) programme, which aims to promote child-friendly schools that are one-stop centres for delivering a broad range of essential services, as well as centres for learning. This initiative employs an intersectoral approach: Interventions in many sectors are used to facilitate and strengthen quality basic education, while work in education contributes to progress in other sectors – particularly HIV/AIDS, nutrition, early childhood development, water, sanitation and hygiene, and child protection.

In Eastern and Southern Africa this approach is being used to respond to the weakening of education systems due to HIV/AIDS and to the challenges of providing adequate services – such as water, sanitation, nutrition and health – to schools and communities. Learning Plus pays careful attention to the special needs of girls, as well as orphans and other vulnerable children, who are often disadvantaged.

With the signing of a communiqué by ministers of education from 13 countries¹ in September 2005, they committed themselves to taking the necessary measures to strengthen their education systems by making schools and alternative learning centres viable as both centres of learning and the primary channels through which essential services are provided for children.

¹ Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Key messages

- A comprehensive range of services in schools, homes and communities is essential for children's development. Schools are the primary place where children can learn and where parents and communities can rely on the safety and care of their children. And because schools hold large numbers of children at any one time, they are the ideal places to provide, and to promote, such essential services as deworming, vaccinations and feeding initiatives.
- As the education sector faces many demands and multiple threats – including poverty, HIV/AIDS, drought, food insecurity and political instability – schools are challenged in providing the care and support required by the most vulnerable children, particularly girls, orphans and the disabled. And they are experiencing problems related to limited access, increasing costs, large numbers of children out of school, deteriorating nutritional status of children attending school, and violence against children in and around schools.
- Collaboration and coordination with other sectors and agencies is indispensable to identifying and delivering such essential services as school feeding, HIV/AIDS prevention, early childhood development, water, sanitation and hygiene, protective environments, and care and support in schools.



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Intersectoral links

Learning Plus works closely with two other Bold Initiatives, the School-Fee Abolition Initiative and the Essential Learning Package, and supports the BEGE as it promotes Life Skills-Based Education. This initiative will also work in concert with other agencies and campaigns, in particular, *Unite for Children. Unite against AIDS* – a UNICEF-led partnership that provides a child-focused framework of nationally owned programmes incorporating specific targets for 2010 and concentrating on the 'Four Ps': Prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Provide paediatric treatment. Prevent infection among adolescents and young people. Protect and support children affected by HIV/AIDS.

Nutrition, feeding and gardens form a cluster of services that Learning Plus supports in schools, in line with the Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative. Led by UNICEF and the World Food Programme, the initiative contributes to fulfilling Millennium Development Goal 1 – eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – by stimulating, enabling and assisting national governments to effectively address hunger and undernutrition within national policies and programmes, and by supporting families and communities in their direct efforts to end child hunger.

Partnerships

Global and regional partnerships – including the African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Fast-Track Initiative (FTI), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Southern African Development Community (SADC), UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on HIV/AIDS in Education, and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) – will be promoted and strengthened. The goal is to facilitate continuous advocacy and networking that encourages schools to become centres of care and support.

Partnerships will also assist in lobbying stakeholders and policymakers for support to schools as learning and care centres for vulnerable children, and they will facilitate dialogue on service delivery through the school. A comprehensive advocacy strategy will be developed to enhance awareness on issues of care and support within the schools, and to assist in lobbying for free and compulsory basic education and provision of school materials.